

# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

---

Vol. XV

MARCH 1961

No. 177

---

## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL		384
WHAT IS THE CHURCH?—		
I: THE WORD OF GOD	Herbert McCabe, O.P.	385
ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	Joseph Bourke, O.P.	398
HAS MAN A SPIRITUAL LIFE?	Philip Holdsworth, O.S.B.	406
THE PERSON AND THE PLACE—		
I: ABBOT SUGER	Geoffrey Webb	413
REVIEWS: Charles Davis, Theodore Taylor, Roland Potter, Robert Sharp, Sebastian Bullough, Hugo Meynell, Geoffrey Webb, Ann Hales-Tooke		419

---

*Literary Communications and Books for Review* to the Editor, Life of the Spirit, Blackfriars, Cambridge. (Tel. 51514.)

*Subscriptions, Orders, and communications about Advertisements* to the Manager, Blackfriars Publications, 34 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1 (Tel. Museum 5728). Annual Subscription 30s. (\$4.50) post free. Single copies 2s. 6d. (50 cents).

## EDITORIAL

‘ONE.’ This issue contains two more articles whose general title is followed by this rather bleak figure: four altogether in the last three issues. Is the editor over-optimistic in starting so many new series? He hopes not; indeed, he plans further series to follow. Each article is, of course, self-contained; it is hardly necessary, in a review of this kind, to keep the appetite of readers whetted by breaking off at the most exciting point with the rubric ‘to be continued in our next’. But this method should provide continuity between different numbers, with the recurrence of themes at intervals of, roughly, three months. Not that special numbers on a single theme will not occur from time to time: the April number, for example, is to contain articles on St Catherine of Sienna, to mark the five-hundredth anniversary of her canonization. But such occasions are necessarily rare: the unity sought for must be of a more serial kind. At the moment series on theology, scripture, religious life and the lives of holy men and women (not necessarily canonized) have been begun; later we hope to have something on liturgy, the Fathers, and moral theology. Readers will have noticed already *The Spirit in the World*, on the work of secular institutes, and *Our Lady in Scripture*: this month Fr McCabe begins a series of articles on the Church, and Fr Webb writes about people whose personality and teaching were in close relationship with the ‘holy place’ that dominated their life. Jugglers entertain us by the quantity of oranges they can keep simultaneously in the air: the editor hopes for continued sympathy and support in his effort to let nothing drop.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH?—

### I: THE WORD OF GOD

HERBERT MCCABE, O.P.

**T**HIS article, and the four which follow,<sup>1</sup> will be about revelation, about the community God has established, and about the sacraments that constitute it: they are theological, concerned with God and his dealings with men. Most of what I say will probably be pretty familiar stuff to you, but some of it may be new; this is because I shall be drawing on the results of the great theological revival which has been going on for some years in the Church but which has not yet had its full effect in England. A word in passing about this revival, because we will be constantly coming back to it. It is one aspect of a quiet reformation, a surge of new life within the Church. The most obvious signs of this are the liturgical movement, the return to the scriptures and the Fathers and, above all, the new understanding of the place of the laity in the Church. There is a good deal in common between this movement of reform and the reformation which went sour on us in the sixteenth century. Quite a lot of what we shall be saying would have delighted the heart of Martin Luther, for example. Indeed it is precisely because they would have delighted his heart that they tended to be shelved by Catholics of the counter-reformation. The urgent task then was to defend the Church against nationalism and it was more important to stress the differences between protestants and Catholics than the similarities. Now the situation has changed a good deal and many of the ideas that had been kept in the dark have been brought out into the light where they are flourishing immensely.

Theology exists because God did not only make man, he also spoke to him. Here when I say 'theology' I mean what is sometimes called 'revealed theology' as opposed to natural theology. There seems to me to be such a great difference between these two that it is a mistake to use the same word for both. What is

<sup>1</sup> They are based on talks and discussions with students, particularly at the universities of Hull and Durham, and at conferences of the Union of Catholic Students. The author wishes to thank all those who took part in these discussions for their help in clarifying his ideas.



called 'natural theology' is a part of philosophy; it is a certain kind of reflection on the world, it has no immediate connection with faith or dogma. It is true that philosophers, generally speaking, are the most dogmatic of men, but they cannot claim any divine authority for their dogmatism. The kind of philosophical reflection that is called 'natural theology' exists because God made the world and men. I think that this reflection can lead to the conclusion that there is a 'beyond' that transcends all that we can know. Broadly speaking we look at the world and it has a created look about it, which is as far as we can go. There used to be an idea (invented, I think, by Pascal) that the God of the philosophers was a different kind of being from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now of course the God of the philosophers that Pascal had in mind may very well be different from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but the God of my philosophy (and here I am at one with St Thomas) is not well known enough to be different from Yahweh of the old testament. Philosophy tells us almost nothing about God, certainly not enough to set up a rival religion.

God made me and he made the whole world; and this is the reason why it is possible by reflecting upon the world to come to know that God exists. This kind of reflection is a matter of philosophy and like any other important or interesting philosophical question it is a matter of great controversy. So far as I know, no philosopher has ever held an interesting position which has not been rejected by the majority of other philosophers, and this business of arriving philosophically at the existence of God is no exception to the rule. Like all other philosophical positions it is a minority opinion. However, so far as I am concerned this does not matter, since the minority includes myself. I want to stress that this is a philosophical opinion but I mention it here because this kind of philosophical reflection is also called theology—'natural theology'.

I am not, in these articles, going to be concerned directly with 'theology' in that sense. Natural theology is possible, in my view, because God made me; theology in the strict sense, in the sense in which I am using it, is possible because God has not only made me but has spoken to me. Theology, in fact, begins not just with the action of God but with the word of God.

The central teaching of our religion is that we are not merely

creatures of God. Besides creating us as the highest kind of material creature God has called us to share in his own uncreated life. This share in the life of God himself is what we call grace. It is extremely important to realize that a creature with grace is not just a higher kind of creature—in the sense, for example, that a creature with intelligence is a higher kind of creature than one without. Grace does not make man a better kind of creature, it raises him beyond creaturehood, it makes him share in divinity. This share in divinity is first of all expressed by the fact that we are not merely things created, we are creatures who are on speaking terms with God. Because of the divine life in us, the Spirit of God in us, we are able to listen to what God says—this is what we call faith. Because of the divine life in us we are able to speak back to God. As St Paul says: 'The Spirit comes to the rescue of our weakness; for we do not know what to ask for in order to pray properly, but the Spirit himself prays for us'. (Rom. 8, 26.)

Now what exactly do we mean by the Word of God? The question is not all that easy to answer, in fact the whole of this article will be spent in failing to answer it. It is one of the characteristics of the key phrases in religious discussion that their meaning cannot be exhausted by a simple definition—the same, of course, is true of important philosophical terms. Whereas in, say, physics the vast majority of technical terms have a simple and adequate definition, this is not the case in theology. I think there are good reasons for this but I shall not go into them now: roughly I should say that it comes about because theology, like philosophy, is very largely concerned with what is specifically human, and human nature in the end transcends the limits of human language. Our language is at home with objects, it has difficulty with subjects. When I say that the key theological terms cannot be simply defined I do not mean that they are inexact or woolly. The difficulty with them is that they have application at many different levels, and an explanation which will do at one level is inadequate at another. In this respect there is a certain resemblance between theological language and the language of poetry: you can go on seeing more and more depth of meaning in a poetic image without ever exhausting its implications, and the same is true of a statement such as: 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'.

Of course it can happen, and it has happened, that theologians



forget the depth of meaning in their words. This accounts for the dreary and futile business that you often get in manuals of theology; a matter of solving verbal puzzles instead of dealing with human and divine mysteries. Our most respectable Catholic newspaper has a column in which a theologian answers readers' queries. It is, alas, headed: 'Here's the answer'. I suppose this is inevitable in journalism, but it is a pity that the impression is given that theological questions can be answered in a kind of pious quiz. In theology as in philosophy there are no slick answers, which is perhaps why theologians and philosophers talk so interminably.

One reason why theological terms behave like poetic images is that the language which God chose for speaking to us is very often the language of poetry. God did not provide us with a divinely inspired manual of doctrine; instead he gave us a library of all kinds of books, a great number of which are books of poetry. The Bible is the first thing we mean when we speak of the Word of God. Later we shall look into the Bible to see what it says about itself, to see what the word of God says about the word of God, but first I want to say something in general about the theological purpose of the Bible.

St Thomas remarked that whereas men can talk only with words and gestures, God can talk with the course of history itself. He can guide the course of events in such a way as to give them a significance which reveals him to us. This is what he has done with his chosen people, he has so ordered their history that the events themselves tell us of him. The history of the Hebrews not only leads up to the revelation of God in Christ, it also foreshadows it. The development of the Hebrew people already tells us about Christ and in fact Christ is unintelligible without this background. The history of the Hebrews is like a play; things happen in the first act which symbolize themes in the play but the symbolism is only fully appreciated when we get to act five. It is not just the words of the play, but the action, which carries the meaning. Frequently in a play the characters do not themselves recognize the full meaning or symbolic character of what they do and say, hence what we used to call 'dramatic irony'. The same is true of the sacred drama of Hebrew history. Normally the Hebrews did not get beyond recognizing that their history did have a divine significance. They realized that they had a definite destiny pre-ordained by God, that they were fulfilling a divine

plan, but the shape of this destiny was hidden from them. Some of them, however, were given a greater insight into the divine plan, and these are the men we call prophets. The special character of the prophet is not precisely that he predicts the future, but that he sees the working of the divine plan in the life of his people, he predicts the future just in so far as this plan points forward to the future.

God, however, has not merely given us a divine history; he has also given us an authentic interpretation of that history. This is the Bible. The one thing that all the books of the Bible have in common is that they all have something to do with the chosen people and their destiny, but they do not simply chronicle events; the history is written up in such a way as to highlight its significance for the divine plan. The books of Samuel, for example, do for the history of Saul and David much the same thing as Shakespeare does for, say, Julius Caesar: what we have is more than a record of facts, it is an interpreted record. The difference is that here we have a uniquely authentic interpretation because the author of the interpretation is also the author of the facts themselves.

In sacred history, then, we have first of all persons, things and events which have a significance of their own, and then their significance is brought out and made clear through the words of scripture which describe them. As we shall see, in this the Bible resembles the sacraments. In each of the sacraments there is first of all a symbolic significant gesture or thing, which we call the 'matter' of the sacrament, and then the significance of this is brought out and made clear by words, which we call the 'form'. The sacraments, like the Bible, are revelations of God, and their structure, so to speak, is the same. But more of this later.

The Hebrew people had a history—this is the most important thing about them—but the Bible too has a history. It was not written all at one time; it is, as I said, a library of books, some of them centuries older than others. In the Bible we can watch the gradual process by which the Hebrews became more and more aware of the significance of their destiny. We can watch the growth of certain key ideas, certain words and images which slowly acquire a traditional symbolism. The imagery of a language embodies the life of the people who use it, and the richness and complexity of the religious language of the chosen people results



from their divinely guided history. The meanings of their words are full of historical associations. To understand, for example, what an image like the 'Shepherd' meant for them, it is necessary to know about the history of Abel and Abraham and Moses and David and so on. Poetic imagery is used by certain writers and then handed down enriched to be used by later ones. In fact it is possible to think of the whole old testament history as a period during which God was slowly preparing and maturing a language which would be fit for use in speaking of his Son. Let us watch this process at work in the case of the image of the Word of God. St John says simply, 'In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us'. Let us unpack some of the meaning contained in this phrase.

'The Lord Yahweh', said one of the early prophets, 'does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared: who will not fear? The Lord Yahweh has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (Amos 3, 7).

This passage sums up the thought of the Hebrews in the eighth century before Christ about the connection between the action of God and his revelation of himself. The acts of God are all revelations of his 'secret', his mysterious plan, and at every stage in the plan God reveals the significance of his acts to the prophets. God acts and speaks simultaneously. As a matter of fact the Hebrew language has a word, *dabar*, which means both word and deed. The word of God always accomplishes something. This is seen most clearly in the fifth-century poem about creation which begins Genesis:

God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light . . .

God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters' . . . etc.

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness . . . '.

At each stage in this vision of creation, God speaks and his word is creative. This was not, of course, a bright original idea of the author of this creation poem. He is drawing here upon an imagery which had become traditional, almost a cliché in Hebrew literature. There are plenty of other examples of it scattered throughout the Old Testament:

By the Word of Yahweh the heavens were made  
and all their host by the breath of his mouth. (Psalm 33.)



Lift up your eyes and see  
 who created these  
 He brings out their host by number  
 calling them all by name. (Psalm 40.)

Let all thy creatures serve thee  
 for thou hast spoken and they were made  
 thou didst send forth thy breath and they were created  
 and nothing can resist thy voice. (Judith 16, 17.)

The Word of God is then first of all creative, or to put it the other way round, creation is word from God. His acts tell us of him.

The heavens tell of the glory of Yahweh  
 and the firmament proclaims his handiwork  
 . . . their voice is not heard  
 yet their voice goes through all the earth  
 and their words to the end of the world. (Psalm 19.)

But it was not first of all as creator of the whole world that the Hebrews saw God as revealing himself. First of all he revealed his secret plan in the way he guided their history. The Word of God is first of all heard in the creation and government of the Hebrews; it is only later that this is extended to the world as a whole.

The turning point of history for the Hebrews was the exodus, for this was the moment when they were created as a people. This great deed is always in their minds when they think of Yahweh. He is 'Your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt'. This is what they celebrate every year in the passover. At this feast they remember each year who they are: they are the people created by God, brought out from Egypt to accomplish a mysterious divine destiny. In its primitive origins the pasch was almost certainly a feast of the seasons, a feast of new life, just as the Christian pasch of Easter is bound up with the pagan spring festivals of the dying god and new life—but more of this later on. The important point is that the Hebrews used the feast of new life to celebrate the new life of Israel. Israel had gone down into a kind of death in Egypt, just as the dying god of middle eastern religions goes down into the underworld each year. Now at the pasch Israel rose from the dead, came up from the grave and passed through the waters of the Red Sea to be welded into a new people. All these ideas, which we will see being developed in the

theology of the resurrection and Christian baptism, are already present in the thought of the prophets of Israel.

The great deeds of the exodus are accomplished by the word of God. Just as the stars of heaven are called into being by this word:

He brings out their host by number  
calling them all by name. (Is. 40, 26.)

so Israel is called out of Egypt by the word of God:

When Israel was a child I loved him  
and out of Egypt I called my son,

says Hosea, and goes on:

The more I called them, the more they went from me.  
(Hos. 11, 1.)

It is the word of God which slays the Egyptians, according to the author of the book of Wisdom,

While deep silence covered all things  
and night was in the midst of her course  
from the heights of heaven, thy almighty word  
leapt down from the royal throne  
a fierce warrior into the midst of a land  
devoted to destruction. (Wisdom 18, 4.)

As you read these passages I expect you will be reminded of their application in the new testament to the Word made flesh. In fact St Matthew, who constantly wants to make the point that Christ himself is the new Israel, refers back to the passage from Hosea when he tells the story of the flight into Egypt. 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' And the passage about the Word leaping down from his royal throne during the silence of the night is used in one of the masses of Christmastide to refer to the birth of Christ.

The word of God not only creates the people of God but it also comes to them in the form of the law. God speaks to Moses on mount Sinai and in so far as Israel receives this word of God and keeps the law, she remains a distinctive people, a special community. The presence of the law, the presence of the word of God preserves the identity of the Hebrews. Whenever they turn from the law they tend to mingle with the surrounding nations and this compromises their distinctive identity as it compromises their destiny.



The book of Exodus, after giving the story of the delivery of Israel from Egypt (or rather after giving at least two rather different stories of the delivery from Egypt), goes on to speak of the giving of the law, the ten commandments. Then there are many strange pages about how to make something called the ark of the covenant and the great tent or tabernacle. The point of the ark is that it was the dwelling place of the Word of God:

In the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat. . . . I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Ex. 25, 21.)

The ark dwells in the great tent, and it is ceremonially installed there, at a significant date:

Yahweh said to Moses: On the first day of the first month, you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. And you shall put in it the ark of the testament. (Ex. 40, 1.)

The meaning of this ceremony is that the word of God, dwelling in the ark, has pitched his tent among the people of Israel. And this, of course, is what St John is referring back to when he says

‘The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us’ (the phrase ‘dwelt amongst us’ is an impoverishment of St John’s words).

The word of God is thus for the Hebrews not merely something that is listened to and understood, it is creative and life-giving. The Hebrew people were created by the word of God and the Word dwells among them to give them life. In a famous passage in the book of Deuteronomy, Yahweh is represented as saying that he allowed Israel to go hungry in the desert for forty years but fed them with manna, with ‘bread from heaven’, so that ‘he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but by everything that comes forth from the mouth of God’. (Deut. 8, 3.) Here the word of God is compared to the bread by which a man lives. The bread of Israel is to be the word of God. This, needless to say, is the background to the eucharistic theology of St John.

There is no need here for more detailed investigation into the old testament development of the image of the Word of God; the essential point is that the word of God does not merely convey information, it is creative of the people of God, it is creative in

fact of the whole world, it dwells among the people of God to preserve them, it is their bread which brings them life.

The word of God is his presence in the world both revealing him and giving life to the world. The thing is summed up in a famous poem in the book of Isaiah:

As the rain and snow come down from heaven  
and return not thither until they have watered the earth  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose  
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Is. 55, 10.)

This is the picture upon which St John bases the structure of the poem with which he begins his gospel. The picture is of the Word of God coming out from God, bringing fertility and life to the world, and then returning once more to God having accomplished his purpose. The prologue begins with the Word 'with God', it comes to its climax when the 'Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us' and then finishes with the Word once more 'in the bosom of the Father'. It has recently been suggested that there is, in fact, an exact correspondence between the verses on the way down and the way up.

The point I want to stress is that when St John came to write he had ready formed for him the image of the word of God. You might say that the new testament comes about by taking the old testament literally. What in the old testament was a metaphorical way of describing the action of God in the world becomes in the new testament a literal account. The thing is that unless we realize that the literal account is the concrete realization of an image, we miss the meaning. In the new testament the pictures have come to life, but the fact that they are alive must not make us forget that they are pictures. To take a look forward into a later article: in the eucharist our bread really and literally is the Word of God, but we only see the point of it when we remember the metaphor of which this is the concrete realization.

In the notion of the word of God, the ideas of knowledge and life are tied up together. The Word shows us God and at the same time brings us life from him, in fact brings us his life. This is why



St John fixed on this image to describe Christ; by receiving Christ we receive together knowledge of God and the life of God. We are given new life, reborn as new creatures, by coming to know God. The constant intertwining of the words light and life in St John's Gospel teach us the same thing:

What came to be in him was life

and life was the light of mankind. (Jn. 1, 4.)

We can say either that this gospel is about the conquest of darkness by light, or the victory of life over death.

The response to the Word of God is faith, and faith involves life:

He that believes in the Son has everlasting life

He that does not believe shall not see life. (Jn. 3, 36.)

He that believes in me has everlasting life.

I am the bread of life. (Jn. 6, 47.)

I am resurrection, I am life.

He that believes in me, even though he be dead, shall live.

Everyone that lives and believes in me shall not die for ever.

(Jn. 11, 25.)

and so on; there are dozens of places where this kind of thing is said in St John's gospel. Receiving the Word of God is not just a matter of getting to know something, it is a matter of receiving a more intense life, the life of God himself.

These two aspects of the word of God are very clearly brought out in the structure of the mass. This begins with a liturgy of the word of God in which the emphasis is on the knowledge side—the reading of the word in the epistle and gospel. It is followed by the sacrifice in which the emphasis is on the Word of God as life-giving; he is present to the sacramental symbols of food and drink.

There is no doubt at all that in the past few centuries we have tended to let these two fall too far apart. Catholics, especially since the Reformation, have played down both the life-giving character of the scriptures and the symbolic character of the eucharist. Some protestants had denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the eucharist and said that the bread and wine were *merely* symbolic. This naturally led them to lay a much greater emphasis than contemporary Catholics did on the presence of God in the scriptures. Catholics, nervous of protestant

contagion—and perhaps especially nervous of being mistaken for protestants by the inquisition—leaned over backwards to say the opposite. The actual scriptures ceased to be thought of as a nourishment for Catholics, and they substituted books of christian doctrine. It did not seem to them scandalous or even particularly surprising that the epistle and gospel at mass should be read in an inaudible murmur in a foreign language by someone standing with his back to them—it is all right because soon he will turn round and tell us quite audibly about the catechism and the second collection.

In the same way it was equally forgotten that the eucharist is symbolic, that it shows us something, is a revelation of God. But more of this in a later article.

There can be no doubt, then, that for St John and the early Church, the response to Christ which they call faith, the reception of the Word of God, is something that brings life with it. Of course we must not think of the response to faith as something which comes from our side to meet the Word of God coming from God's side. The response to the Word is a part of the coming of the Word, it is the Word in us.

'No man can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.' (Jn. 6, 44.) Both revelation and faith come from the Father. He sends his Word to us and draws us to his Word.

This notion of faith as a living response to Christ is the principal meaning of the word in the new testament, whether in St John or St Paul, and it is one which the protestant churches have on the whole stressed very strongly. When a protestant says we are saved by faith alone, it is normally faith in this sense that he has in mind, faith in the sense of complete abandonment to Christ, a turning from reliance on created things to reliance solely upon the Word of God. This is, as I say, the primary sense of the word 'faith', but there is another sense in which, for example, St Paul distinguishes it from love and from trust in the fulfilment of God's plan, or hope. When, he says, God's plan has finally come to complete fulfilment, faith and hope will pass away, only love will remain.

In this sense faith refers to a particular aspect of our response to Christ, our reliance on the Word of God for insight into God's plan. In this aspect our abandonment to Christ means that we do not rely on our own intellectual powers, but, confronted by God's



plan, we (literally) take his Word for it. This is the aspect of faith which is expressed in our assent to truths about God's plan; it is expressed in our proclamation of the creed.

Faith in this sense is an aspect or part of faith in the full sense, but it is a particularly interesting one because it can be detached and exist by itself without the rest. In other words we can accept, by faith, all that God has taught us, without having the rest of the divine life in us. This is traditionally called 'dead faith', faith divorced from its life which is love. It is most important to see that such faith is deformed. Love is not added on to faith from outside; normally faith and love are one thing. Faith without love is something monstrous and incomplete in itself. Certainly this deformed faith is not what St Paul is speaking of when he says repeatedly that we are saved by faith, nor when he contrasts faith with works is he contrasting faith with the deeds of love which are a part of true faith. He is contrasting it with works done without faith, which are not of course works of love, for while we can have divine faith without love, we cannot have divine love without faith.

God who at various times and in different ways spoke to our fathers through the prophets, now in these days, which are the last days, has spoken to us through his Son. (Heb. I, I.)

This is how the epistle to the Hebrews sums up the biblical idea of God's speech. God speaks first of all in the scriptures but finally in the person of Christ. And faith is our response to this Word.

I have said that we have theology because God has spoken to us and I have tried to show that this speech is not simply a matter of giving information. The word of God which is the foundation of theology is also life-giving: it is the source of the life of a community. The source of theology is the source of the Church itself. Theology is an aspect of the life of the Church and we should never try to separate it from the rest of the life of the Church. Nevertheless, as almost any priest working in a parish today will tell you, that is what has happened to a great extent in the past. Theology has come to be thought of as a highly abstract and abstruse subject with no immediate relation to things like hearing confessions or preaching or visiting one's parishioners. Theology is something one does in a seminary and then forgets when one

gets down to the practical business of the last sacraments and housey-housey. But all that is at last changing; we are returning at last to the great tradition in which theology is the intellectual aspect of our total response to the word of God. We are returning to a theology which is immediately related to the scriptures and also immediately related to our personal Christian lives, a theology which makes sense of our lives as adult Christians in the world in which we live.

---

## ENCOUNTER WITH GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

JOSEPH BOURKE, O.P.

‘**A**S the kingdom of God in its perfect form does not lie in mere knowledge, but rather in the life that the knowledge awakens, so it could not be prepared for by the mere knowledge that it was approaching, nor even by the knowledge, outwardly communicated, of what it was. It could be prepared for only by bringing in, and that in ever fuller tides, the life of which it consists. . . . What we meet in the Old Testament are two concrete subjects and their relation. The two are: Jehovah, God of Israel on the one hand, and Israel, the people of Jehovah, on the other; and the third point, which is given in the other two, is their relation to one another. And it is obvious that the denominating or creative factor is the relation to Jehovah.’

Thus a very great theologian, nowadays somewhat neglected,<sup>1</sup> has defined the scope and significance of the old testament. It is the record of a people chosen from among the peoples to live in the light-giving and life-bringing *presence* of Yahweh, and to draw from that presence ‘in ever fuller tides’ supernatural light and life. And this process is to continue until at last the Light of the World comes ‘that they may have life and have it *abundantly*’ (Jn. 10, 10). Again we could say that the old testament is a complex of traditions recording Israel’s awareness of the presence of God in her midst. Out of her elemental experiences of Yahweh’s *presence* to her, Israel draws the intricate web of tradition in which

1 A. B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament* (1904).



he articulates her own response to that presence, the response to holiness.

But if we are to press on to the deeper implications of this idea, we must take cognizance of the fact that the old testament traditions, tangled and interwoven as they are, offer us not one but several distinct ways of conceiving of God's presence, and as many distinct attitudes of response to it. Chief among these alike in antiquity and in theological significance are the two master-ideas of '*Kabod* theology' and '*Shem* theology'. The former derives from the basic conception of Yahweh's presence through his radiant cloud of fire, his *kabod*, the latter from the idea of his sacred name, *shem*, which he has laid upon the people, their land, and their sacred city. In this article I am going to develop the first of these two ideas.

*Kabod* theology, at least in its earlier stages, may with equal justice be called 'encounter' theology or 'apparition' theology. The elemental experience which it records and from which it grows is of Yahweh, whose normal dwelling-place is heaven, suddenly descending to manifest himself in the midst of radiant fire and to encounter those whom he chooses at specific points and dynamic moments.

Exod. 3, 1. 'While Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law . . . the priest of Midian, he led the flock beyond the desert . . . 2. Then an angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (*s'neh*); and when he looked, behold! the bush was on fire and blazing, yet the bush was not consumed! 3. "I will turn aside and see this great sight", said Moses, "Why it is that the bush does not burn away". 4. But when Yahweh saw that he had turned aside to see he called out to him: . . . 5. "Do not approach hither", said he, "and take your sandals off your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground".'

The fact that the burning bush is by no means unknown even as a natural phenomenon in the Middle East is not immediately relevant to our purpose. What is important for us is that fire, in this *kabod* theology the element most immediately associated with Yahweh's person, is the supreme manifestation of his holiness. He appears here as *numen*, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Fire displays all the qualities, so difficult to define, which go to make up the numinous: 'otherness', mystery, sublimity, awfulness,

fierce destructive energy, and above all overwhelming fascination. The unquenchable fire in the story evidently possesses all these attributes. It is quite outside Moses' experience, completely other to the world which he knows; its blazing dynamic energy exercises an overwhelming attraction over him and draws him irresistibly towards it. Then comes the voice, the most sacred manifestation of all, warning him of the danger, warning him not to come too close and to take off his sandals, because he has already entered the radiant sphere of holiness which the *numen* creates about itself.

This concrete instance will serve better than any attempt at an abstract definition to indicate the special experience of holiness which lies at the roots of *kabod* theology. The theophany at Sinai (Exod. 19) is a repetition on a vaster scale and before all the people of the same basic experience. The word-play on *s'neh*, 'bush', and 'Sinai', the name of the mountain, serves to point the correspondence between the two theophanies.

Exod. 19, 11b. '... The third day Yahweh will come down in the sight of all the people on Mount Sinai, 12. Do you set bounds for the people all round, and tell them: "Take heed to yourselves, do not go up the mountain! Do not touch its fringes! All who touch the mountain shall drop dead!" ... 18. And the whole of Mount Sinai was smoking because Yahweh had descended on it in fire and the smoke rose up like the smoke of a furnace and the whole mountain was shuddering violently. ...'

It is the same 'fire' visitation in an intensified form. Yahweh descends and makes present his holiness in the form of terrible and mysterious fire which creates, by its fierce consuming energy, a radiant sphere of holiness about itself, mortally dangerous to all who enter it unbidden. Yet the voice of Yahweh himself issues from the fire, actually choosing certain representatives of the people to enter this mortally sacred sphere, actually summoning them to join him at its centre:

Exod. 24, 1. 'Then he said to Moses: "Come up to Yahweh, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2. Moses alone may approach Yahweh; the rest must not approach, and the people may not come up with him" ... 9. Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. 10. And they saw the God of Israel; under his feet was something like a

pavement wrought in lapis-lazuli, like heaven itself for purity. II. He did not lay his hand upon the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they gazed upon God and ate and drank.'

Here we have a further 'prototype situation' of the theology of encounter. The author emphasizes with evident wonder that the chosen representatives of the people were here summoned into the intimate presence of this fiery God of Sinai, and survived. Profane though they were, they were miraculously allowed, in this sacred moment, to walk alive and unscathed into the destroying flame of Yahweh's purity. They saw the God of Israel in his purity! They looked upon him! They ate and drank with him! He did not lay his hand upon them! Any further miracle of protection wrought on Israel's behalf is secondary beside this supreme one of having entered into personal communion with Yahweh without being destroyed. Out of this primitive tradition grows Israel's deep and lasting sense of the danger and sublimity involved in living so miraculously close to this God of fire. The flaming holiness of Yahweh is actually absorbed into the people and becomes their life. This is achieved through a communion meal. In the society characteristic of that period and region, human covenants were inaugurated by meals eaten in common by the parties involved. (cf. Gen. 26, 26-31; 31, 44-54.) What is the significance of this? Firstly it involves the bestowal of gifts. A man's property, his flocks and herds, are conceived of as an extension of his own life and person. When he gives one or more of his beasts, representative of the whole, to another, he is in effect bestowing a share of himself on that other. He who accepts the gift incurs the sacred obligation of good will, protection and favour towards the donor. This is particularly clear, for example, in the case of Abraham's gift of seven ewe lambs to Abimelech at Beer-sheba (Gen. 21, 28-32). Furthermore, the sharing of the victim or meal gives rise to and nourishes communion of life between the two parties. Just as food strengthens and nourishes the life of an individual, so this food, eaten in common, strengthens the common life, the 'comm-union' life or 'psychic community', as one author calls it, between the two.

Now the same custom is used by Yahweh to inaugurate a new and miraculous covenant between himself and Israel. According to the ethics of nomad society the Israelites are now sacred to Yahweh—his guests, and at the same time the bringers of gifts



which he has accepted and eaten with them. They have broken bread with him and can be sure of his protection. And because this is no ordinary meal, but a covenant meal, this relationship is to be permanent. This is, indeed, what the covenant means in the more primitive southern tradition with which we are here concerned. The rules of this covenant are laid down in the so-called 'cultic decalogue' of Exod. 34, 10-28, likewise proper to the southern 'J' tradition. Here too the emphasis is on the meal eaten in Yahweh's presence. Periodically the Israelites are to come on pilgrimage to the holy mountain (in later tradition Mount Zion), to renew the encounter and the communion of Sinai. The seasonal feasts marking the changes of the agricultural year are to be purged of their idolatrous connotations and to acquire the new meaning of covenant meals eaten with Yahweh. 'Three times a year all your males shall appear before Lord Yahweh, God of Israel' (Exod. 34, 23). 'You shall worship no other god; for Yahweh, whose name is "Jealous", is a jealous God; lest you make covenant with the inhabitants of the land . . . and someone call you and you eat of his sacrifice' (vv. 14-18). The quality most appropriate to a God who manifests himself in fire is jealousy. Israel is to draw her life, her strength, her security exclusively from Yahweh the fiery, Yahweh the jealous, in these dynamic moments of encounter and communion.

In the same connection we may notice that in human society to eat with one's enemies, or with those of one's covenant-partner, would be inconceivable. *Ipso facto* such an act would weaken and kill the communion life of the covenant. The command not to partake of the sacrificial food offered to other gods is the counterpart in the divine covenant of this human custom. Again in human covenants the great ones of the earth must be propitiated in the very first moment of encounter. The first thing their eyes must fall upon must be the gift in the suppliant's hands, offered in the appropriate attitude of self-abasement. This ensures that from that first vital moment onwards, the expression on the great one's face will be benevolent. Drawing down the favour of the potentate's countenance upon one constitutes a major old testament theme in itself; although it would be impossible to pursue it here, it is a concept of the utmost importance for the theology of grace. Here we must confine ourselves to noticing that it is for this reason that no

suppliant or weaker party in the semitic world would dream of approaching a king or potentate without a propitiatory gift in his hands. With such a background one can understand why it is explicitly stipulated in the 'cultic decalogue' that 'no-one shall appear before me empty-handed' (Exod. 35, 20). The usage of the semitic world has been transformed and elevated into the sacramental context, and Yahweh is thought of as the potentate, the favour of whose countenance must at all costs be gained.

Finally let us notice, as an element of lasting importance for the development of *kabod* theology, that the place of encounter between Yahweh and Israel is a holy mountain.

To summarize: Pilgrimage, encounter, communion are the three cardinal points of 'encounter' theology as we find it in this tradition. Israel goes on pilgrimage to a sacred mountain at sacred times to meet her covenant God. Yahweh descends from heaven amid fire to meet his people and to impart to them his holy life, the energy of his holiness, by means of a covenant meal.

Now it has been argued, by no means implausibly, that the list of place names between Sinai and Canaan recorded in Nb. 33 contains an ancient list of pilgrimage stages from Palestine to Sinai, the original order of which has been reversed to fit the historical context in which it now stands. If true, this would imply that pilgrimages from Palestine to Sinai were regularly made during the early stages of the Israelite settlement. The ancient fragment of tradition preserved in Exod. 24, 1-2, 9-11, which we have quoted above, may well reflect such a practice. The fact that we do find an explicit instance of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' in the story of Elijah (1 Kgs 19) lends colour to the theory. What does appear certain is that, under the influence of the Jerusalem cultus, the entire theology of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' transferred itself wholesale from Sinai to Zion. In Ps. 68, 7 we actually catch a glimpse of this 'migration': 'Why do you glower, you high mountains, at the mountain which God has desired for his home? Yahweh will indeed dwell in it for ever. . . . The Lord is among them as in Sinai in the sanctuary.'

At this point let us spend a few moments in considering the theme, so immensely significant as it is for both old and new testament theology, which grows, whether proximately or remotely, directly or indirectly, out of this 'prototype' theology

of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion'. This theme has been examined by Jeremias in connection with the new testament prophecy of the mission to the gentiles.<sup>2</sup> He analyses it under five headings: (1) The Epiphany of God. (2) The Call of God. (3) The Journey of the Gentiles. (4) Worship at the World Sanctuary. (5) The Messianic Banquet on the World Mountain. These headings alone, I think, will serve to suggest that the theme is a development on the eschatological plane of 'pilgrimage, encounter, communion' as they occur in our 'prototype' situation. But let us briefly consider a few examples from the texts themselves.

*The Theophany.* One of the most striking features of the eschatological theophany is that it is to take place in the sight not only of the Israelites but of the gentiles too. 'The *kabod* shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see it' (Is. 40, 5). The *kabod* will blaze out again over Zion, so long darkened and deserted, drawing all other peoples to it, even as long before, when it blazed over Sinai, it had drawn the Israelites themselves. 'Arise! Shine! For your light has come, and Yahweh's *kabod* has risen over you; for see! Darkness shall cover the earth, and pitch darkness the peoples, but Yahweh shall rise over you, and his *kabod* shall appear upon you. The gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the radiance of your rising.' (Is. 60, 1-3; cf. also Is. 24, 21-23; 26, 11; 30, 27 ff.; 52, 8-12; Hab. 3, 3 ff.; Nah. 1, 2 ff.; Dan. 7, 10, etc.)

*The Summons.* 'Yahweh, God of gods speaks, and summons the earth from sunrise to sunset; from Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.' (Ps. 1, 1-2 cf. 4-7; Is. 45, 20-22; 48, 13-14; Ez. 39, 17 etc.)

*The Pilgrimage.* 'In the last days the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set firm on the top of the mountains, and lifted up above the hills, and all the gentiles shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say: Come, let us go to Yahweh's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob' (Is. 2, 2-3). 'And they shall bring all your brethren from all the gentiles as a gift to Yahweh, on horses and in chariots, in litters, on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain, Jerusalem' (Is. 66, 20; cf. Is. 56, 6-8; 60,

<sup>2</sup> The extension of salvation to the gentiles had been foretold in the old testament but it is not fulfilled in the new until the moment of our Lord's ascension: 'You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight' (Acts 1, 8).



13-14; Zech. 8, 20-23; cf. especially the theme of the 'new exodus' in Deutero-Isaiah: 40, 3-4; 42, 15 ff.; 43, 16 ff.; 48, 21; 49, 9 ff.; 51, 9-10; 55, 12.)

*The Encounter.* 'I will bring them to my holy mountain, make them rejoice in my house of prayer; their holocausts and sacrifices shall be well-received on my altar' (Is. 56, 6-7). 'I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my *kabod*' (Is. 66, 18; cf. Is. 27, 13; 35, 2; 45, 5, 14, 23, 24; 49, 23; 59, 19; Jer. 16, 19; Zech. 14, 16; Pss. 22, 27-29; 86, 9; 96, 9-13; 97, 46; 98, 3).

*The Communion.* 'Upon this mountain Yahweh Sabaoth will make a banquet of fat things, a banquet of vintage wine, of fat things full of marrow, of vintage wines well-clarified. Then he will destroy upon this mountain the mourning-veil that veils all the peoples, and the veil that is spread over all the gentiles. He will destroy death for ever, and Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from every face' (Is. 25, 6-8). 'You shall have a song as in the night when a feast is celebrated, and gladness of heart as when to the tune of pipes, one enters in to the mountain of Yahweh, to the rock of Israel' (Is. 30, 29). This theme appears to have developed in four phases: (a) the grossly corrupt cultic festivals and banquetings sternly condemned by the prophets from Amos onwards (cf. Am. 2, 8; Hos. 4, 11; 8, 13; 9, 1; Is. 28, 7). (b) In deliberate antithesis to this, the terrible 'banquet of blood' decreed by Yahweh against evil-doers, to which he summons as his guests the destructive powers of heaven and earth, especially the beasts and birds of prey (cf. Zeph. 1, 7 ff.; Ez. 39, 17; Is. 34, 6; Jer. 46, 10). (c) This gives way to the theme of the peaceful banquet which the gentiles come to share (Is. 22, 28 ff.) in adoration. (d) A spiritualizing variant appears to have originated in the early prophetic literature, and to have been developed especially in the Wisdom literature, whereby the food of the divine banquet is identified with the word of God (Am. 8, 11 ff.; Jer. 15, 16; Is. 55, 1-3) or with divine wisdom (Prov. 9, 1-6; Sir. 24, 9-22, etc.).

(To be concluded in the May number)

## HAS MAN A SPIRITUAL LIFE?

PHILIP HOLDSWORTH, O.S.B.

IN talk and writing about religion the expression 'the spiritual life' is well known. It is assumed not only to have meaning but to mean something very important. It will not, therefore, be out of place to examine these assumptions in a review that is called LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, a title which has affinity, if not identity, with the expression in question. 'The spiritual life', 'the life of the spirit', how shall we distinguish them? Perhaps any distinction there may be will emerge later.

The spiritual life is considered to be something that a religious man should seriously engage himself in, and an important part of it for him will be his 'spiritual exercises', notably assistance at the sacrifice and reception of the sacraments, but also prayer, public and private, vocal and silent, and 'spiritual reading'. To settle on the measure and manner of these, he will sometimes, even regularly, have recourse to a 'spiritual director'. With good 'spiritual advice' he will be able to understand better his 'spiritual state' and his 'spiritual needs' and so be able better to set about performing his 'spiritual duties'. As a result of fidelity in this he will sometimes, perhaps, experience 'spiritual joy'.

This manner of speaking is very common and can be found in the 'spiritual classics', works in the reading of which we can gain great 'spiritual profit'. There is, for instance, the well-known and compendious *Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* by Fr A. Tanquerey, called *The Spiritual Life*. In the first chapter of part one of this, he treats of the 'origin of the spiritual life', and later on of 'the part of man in the spiritual life'. Instances of such expressions in religious writing could be multiplied *ad infinitum*. We shall look at a few more.

Near the beginning of his *Spiritual Exercises* St Ignatius Loyola writes . . . 'as walking, going and running are bodily exercises, in like manner all methods of preparing and disposing the soul to remove from herself all disorderly attachments, and, after their removal, to seek and find the divine will in the laying out of one's life to the salvation of one's soul, are called spiritual exercises'. (ed. Rickaby, p. 3.) Here the saint seems to think of a certain

parallel between bodily and spiritual exercises, sufficient at any rate for a comparison to be possible.

Less universally known, though once popular in this country, is Bishop Hedley's *Retreat*. In it he speaks of the spiritual life as 'not really complex; but its very simplicity is not attained without much consideration' (16th ed. 1951, p. 5). It is for him something that needs no introduction and justification even if it needs explanation.

These quotations from well-known and revered writers are not given in order to set them up for pillorying but to recall that the expressions under consideration are current in these, as they are in other, accredited authors. Nevertheless the expressions are open to question and it is with misgiving that one reflects on the notions that they seem to suggest and even to be intended to convey. When there is reference to a man's 'spiritual life' it is not unnaturally that the question forms itself in one's mind, 'as opposed to what?' His 'bodily life'? His 'animal or vegetable life'? Is the 'spiritual life' a part of the rest of his life or is it one among several 'lives' that he has? Both situations would disintegrate him horribly. The 'spiritual life' is, we find, something stressed, recommended and extensively catered for by the 'spiritual writers'. It is considered essential, nay, of overriding importance. Nothing must be allowed to destroy it, even to impair it. It is, then, thought of as something that might be in danger of these. But, if it is capable of being diminished or extinguished it is not an inevitable part of man's life. Not being identical with man's life, it is but part of it, or possibly one among several lives that man can live at one time or another. There is, therefore, the suggestion, the strong suggestion, that the spiritual life is a thing in itself, something that some people have and others have not and that all ought to have, that it is a kind of life distinct from other lives, often opposed to, and thought of as incompatible with them; with, for example, a bodily life, a life of pleasure, a sensuous life, a worldly life.

'Well', the spiritual writers might say, 'we conceive the spiritual life to be a way of living, just as a worldly life is a way of living, and spiritual exercises are those which especially or exclusively promote this way of living. We do not think that a single individual can have several lives at once. That would be absurd. Nor even that his life should have so many disparate



parts that never come together. That would still be an error. But we think both that the spiritual life is the most important element in life for those who have it, and that it is so much a better life which has it than that which does not have it, that the spiritual life may be considered to be the best kind of human life and may therefore rightly be spoken of in the way we do. It is then a carping criticism that you are making of us.'

If this is more or less what is meant when the spiritual life is being spoken of, then almost all of our criticism of the expression must be withdrawn. But it is not clear that this is so, rather there are serious grounds for believing that it is not so. Let us look again at the authorities already adduced in the discussion. What does Tanqueray mean by the 'spiritual life'? 'Man is a mysterious compound of body and soul', he tells us. 'In him spirit and matter closely unite to form but one nature and person. Man is, so to speak, the nexus, the point of contact, between spiritual and bodily substances—an abstract of all the marvels of creation. He is a little world gathering in itself all other worlds, a microcosm showing forth the wisdom of God who united in this fashion two things so far apart.' This, even with benign interpretation, is already, some of it, dangerous talk. Certainly Tanqueray wants to insist on the unity of man. The question is whether he does not, while trying to secure it, betray it. He continues: 'This little world is full of life; according to St Gregory one finds there three sorts of life, vegetative, animal and intellectual. . . . These three kinds of life are not superimposed one on another, but they blend and arrange themselves in due relation in order to converge towards the same end—the perfection of the whole man.' Again we see his anxiety to safeguard the unity of man and his adoption of equivocal, if not worse, terms in which to do it. Man is in fact left with a plurality of lives. Moreover, and this is not an uncharacteristic feature in 'spiritual' writing, he slurs the meaning of his authority. St Gregory wrote *homo habet vivere cum plantis, sentire cum animantibus, intelligere cum angelis*. We might more faithfully render 'man has, in common with plants, the activity of life; with animals, that of sensing; with angels, that of understanding'. This does not give him three lives, but the other way of speaking does.

St Ignatius Loyola not only believes in a distinct spiritual life but thinks that its activities can be visibly manifest. He writes:

'When he who gives the Exercises perceives that the exercitant experiences no spiritual stirrings in the soul, such as consolations and desolations, nor is troubled by various spirits, he should carefully interrogate him concerning the Exercises, whether he is doing them at the appointed time, and how, etc.' (ed. Rickaby, p. 5.)

*The Imitation of Christ* is, perhaps, the best-known of all spiritual classics. Does it favour the way of speaking that we are condemning? Perhaps because of its unintellectual, not to say anti-intellectual, outlook it does not overtly divide man so much. It is not, however, free from a tendency to excessive 'spiritualizing'. 'Keep your friendship', it says, 'for God and his holy angels, shunning the acquaintance of men.' At first sight, and especially if one has been brought up with this sort of thing, it seems very edifying. But it does not, on reflection, accord with the thought of, for example, St John when he said, 'He that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?' (1 John 4, 20.) Recent translators of *The Imitation*, Ronald Knox and Michael Oakley, have fathered on it more 'spiritualization' than it has. For instance, in Bk. I, c. 18, the text twice refers to 'spiritual progress', *ad spiritualem profectum*, *in spiritu proficiebant*, in sections 2 and 4 respectively. This milder expression is rendered by these translators, 'to rise higher in the spiritual life', 'they advanced . . . in the spiritual life', shifts of conception which tell more about the translator's outlook than about that of their original.

But of our authors it is Bishop Hedley that is most incautious, surprisingly, since although less celebrated he is more large-minded and better balanced in judgment than the others. In c. 2 of his *Retreat* he expounds the spiritual nature of the human soul and, let it be said, explicitly allows that the body of man causes his soul to be 'different from any other spirit'. But he tends to talk of man as a spirit as of a substance complete in its nature. And he actually says 'A human being may be said to *be* his soul' (his italics). Further, until we die, we have, even the best of us, he thinks, not yet reached our real life. 'Your real life is all to come after the dissolution which you call death' (p. 10). Reading the 'all' here one wonders whether the holy Bishop thought of what he wrote, forgetting in this way as he does the life of the mystical body of Christ or relegating it wholly to the *post mortem*

state of man. 'But you know what he meant', someone will say. Do I? How do I, if he, reputed a careful Thomist, does not tell me? Spiritual books have as their purpose the guidance of men to the truth in the following of Christ. They should, therefore, tell the truth and in a way that does not mislead. The sentence quoted is either false or misleading, or, improbable hypothesis. Bishop Hedley did not mean us to take his statements seriously.

But, it may still be argued, are we not complaining unreasonably about a *façon de parler*, a mannerism, of the spiritual writers, one moreover that is quite respectable and goes back a long way, to the Fathers of the Church, to St Paul himself? Does not St Paul say, 'Walk in the spirit and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. For these are contrary one to another: so that you do not do the things that you would' (Gal. 5, 16)? In view of this can it be so wrong to speak of the 'spiritual life'? Surely the Fathers have on the strength of this and other texts from the new testament handed on to us a perfectly legitimate conception of the 'spiritual life'? In this two broad admissions may be made at the outset, first that it is true that the notion of the spiritual life does in some way derive from the Bible, and second that there is in consequence some legitimate sense in which we may speak of it. It does not of course follow that spiritual writers generally have adhered to a sound notion of it. Our contention is that very often they have not.

What then of St Paul? His uses of the terms 'spirit', 'body' and 'flesh' are well known to be complex and obviously a full statement of them cannot be given here. It may suffice to consider two passages most in apparent conflict with the view now being advanced. One of them has been quoted already—Gal. 5, 16; the other is Rom. 8, 4, 'That the justification of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. For they that are according to the flesh mind the things that are of the flesh: but they that are according to the spirit mind the things that are of the spirit.' It is to be noted that Knox translates the phrase behind the Douai version's 'they that are according to the spirit' by 'to live the life of the spirit', inaccurate if not tendentious, for the 'life of the spirit' might be taken to mean what St Paul meant but might more plausibly mean a 'spiritual life' in a later sense. It might mean simply a life that is



according to the requirements of Christian teaching or it might mean some kind of special life proper to 'spirits'. We must not, however, credit St Paul with the intention of any subtle psychologizing. As Bonsirven says, 'Though seeming to oppose flesh and spirit, his dualism in morals in no way derives from the metaphysical dualism of the Greek philosophers. Semite in his way of thinking, familiar with the language and outlook of the Bible, he does not divide up man, but takes him as completely one person, a person identified first with body and flesh, despite the role attributed to the soul, the spirit and the heart.' (*L'Evangile de Paul*, p. 104.) In the texts that we are considering Père Allo also explains St Paul's use of the word 'spirit' as an exclusively moral one: it is opposed to 'flesh', in the sense of human weakness and vices. It would mean then something like 'moral strength and virtue'. One is tempted to say that it is simply St Paul's Hebrew way of speaking about men as acting well or acting badly. But it is more than this. He recognized the complexity of elements in man, their diversity and their frequent contrariety, though he neither analyses them closely nor classifies them. When, in Romans 8, 10, he says 'If Christ be in you the body indeed is dead, because of sin: but the spirit liveth, because of justification', he gives us our best ground for talking about the spiritual life. But we should know what he means: 'the body is dead' is not to be taken as meaning that our present body is a corpse, which is false, but that our fleshly nature is mortal, which is true; on the other hand 'the spirit liveth' is not to be taken to mean that our soul 'alone' is affected by the life of grace given by justification but that man himself is. St Paul uses 'body' and 'spirit' for man as a whole, though man considered in different ways.

This brings us to the final point, to sound an alarm against the unchristian dismemberment of man, leading to an unchristian emphasis on one of the *disiecta membra*, man's 'spirit', and its 'life'. Those writers on the Christian life most addicted to this are not necessarily aware of what they are doing, indeed we have seen some of them doing it in the very act of trying not to. But the habit remains and it can lead to some false notions and some unnecessary problems. One of the false notions is that there is spiritual exercise as well as bodily (St Ignatius), another is that of a spiritual duty as distinct from a non-spiritual duty. One of the unnecessary problems is that of finding a way for lay people or

people 'in the world' to lead the spiritual life when we have already given it characteristics of a kind incompatible with the necessary circumstances of most men's lives. Another is that of preserving 'recollection', for because of this wrong notion of the spiritual life, a mistaken idea of recollection has arisen. It is taken to mean not, as it should, a gathering and focussing of one's powers under the direction of reason, but a supposed shutting off of all 'non-spiritual' objects and activities, a project as impossible as it is undesirable. 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see and the ears that hear what you hear', said our Lord, and it is a tragedy that Christians have so often tried to substitute for his teaching that of Plotinus. It is probably fortunate that most Catholics do not read the 'spiritual' books anyway: it is certainly a pity that more of us do not read the Bible more often, so that the market for the former would dry up entirely.

---

## NOTICE

ON the title page of our April issue, readers will notice a change of address. While our editorial work continues to be done at Blackfriars, Cambridge, the production and publication of LIFE OF THE SPIRIT will be taken over in April by Blackfriars Publications Limited, 2 Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, E.C.4, a company recently set up by Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, Her Majesty's printers, in close co-operation with the Dominican province.

While the new arrangements will have no effect whatsoever upon editorial policy, it is hoped that the setting up of a separate company, backed by the considerable experience of Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, will in time provide a firm and positive basis for the growth and expansion of Dominican publishing enterprise.

## THE PERSON AND THE PLACE—

### I: ABBOT SUGER

GEOFFREY WEBB

IT has been concluded, on the evidence of the verses that Suger wrote to celebrate his new basilica, that he looked upon it mainly as a monument to his own greatness. But although one admits that he was not without his streak of vanity, this particular manifestation of what at first glance appears to be mere complacency is worth examining more closely. His verses are not simply tombstone bombast; on the contrary, each one has a definite message to convey. It becomes clear that they were written for a purpose more interesting than that of Suger's self-aggrandizement. They were meant, in fact, to provide a commentary on the whole conception and undertaking of the new St Denis, his *opus nobile*, as he calls it.

It is, of course, not easy for us to imagine why Gothic architecture and traditional Christian iconography should require any explanation. It requires a real effort to imagine St Denis making the sort of impact on Suger's contemporaries that Ronchamp makes on ours. But as Emile Mâle points out, Suger offered something that really was new in 1144, and it needed explaining if it was to be fully understood. The feeling for a developed typology in art had somehow been lost. This seems strange when one remembers that this was the age of the Victorines, when allegory in the literary field had reached its zenith, but when one thinks, for instance, of the old testament panorama painted on the ceiling of St Savin, done in the manner of the Bayeux tapestry as a straight narrative and nothing more, one can appreciate the truth of Mâle's observation. The typology was implicitly there, and taken for granted, one supposes, but in no way was it made explicit until 1144 and the consecration of St Denis, after which we find a positive vogue for the sort of thing that Suger introduced.

St Denis was new in every sense. It was the first major building in the 'new French style' (or gothic, as it has since been mysteriously re-named). It was a synthesis of features which, in the

DOMINICAN COLLEGE LIBRARY

RIVER FOREST,

ILLINOIS



previous style, the romanesque, had been used in isolation. Suger clearly welcomed it, not only because it was so new, so near at hand (it came to birth in the Ile de France), but above all because it presented possibilities of bringing light into a church on a scale which, until then, would have been thought impossible. The windows of the romanesque apse had been few and small, and there was usually a dominant mural. The impression had been somewhat byzantine, but lacking the glitter of mosaic it tended to look heavy, blank, and dark. The romanesque had used 'quiet, stable masses; it was mass at rest'. But the new style was 'an animated interplay of forces, an active process taking hold of the entire building, tending to overcome weight, to expand and soar'. Suger speaks with pride of this *superior voltarum sublimitas*, which must have seemed incredibly daring, giving an impression of danger, a feeling of unease, that such apparently delicate structure should be kept in place by sheer thrust and counter-thrust in the walls and the arches overhead. But his satisfaction was not merely with the architectural feat, but to a far greater degree with the light that could flood in from all sides, now that sheer mass was no longer necessary to support a high roof. Even the mural of Christ in glory was unnecessary, being superseded by light, a symbol far finer than a picture.

'Now that we have the new part added to the old', Suger writes, referring to the new apse built on to the old nave, 'the whole building shines with light, radiating from within. This noble work shines, and light floods it throughout. This was done in Suger's time . . . *me duce dum fieret*.' Suger was the leader in all this, he says, and it is the only credit he takes. But in fact he was more than the organizer who gathered the architects and the decorators together. He provided the whole design, as far as its symbolic pattern was concerned. The reason why he is so proud to write his couplets is because he has a theological message to offer in the 'noble work'. If he is pleased with the work of which he is the *dux*, he is more deeply gratified to think that he has been given the privilege of putting his deepest convictions into stone that will endure, through the ages, for the benefit of others.

Everything in the basilica has significance, and nothing is irrelevant. The first thing that strikes one, even before the impression of light has been caught, is the entrance. The doors, in his couplets, are more lights, that shine to enlighten the minds

of those who enter here. To come through Christ, the true door, is to find the way to Christ, the true light. They are fine doors, of cast bronze overlaid with gold, depicting the passion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord. The tympanum above them shows Christ in glory and enthroned as judge. The whole conception is framed by the five wise virgins on his right, who symbolize the elect, and the five foolish at his left, who are damned. Again, it is a question of those who have the light, and those who are in darkness. Through the redemptive events of Christ's life, the Christian makes his way to salvation, which is seen, above all, as enlightenment, true to the earliest Christian tradition.

It is fortunate indeed that Suger wrote so detailed an account of what he did at St Denis, in his two works on the administration of the abbey and the consecration of the church, for without it we would know very little of the marvels which are no longer there to be admired. Most wonderful of all of them, without any doubt, was the great golden cross that marked the site of the martyrdom of the patron saints, Denis, Rusticus and Eleutherius. Standing about twenty feet high, it was visible from all parts of the building. Mâle reconstructs it thus, with the help of Suger's verses and the only faithful copy that still exists on anything approaching the scale of the original. 'A gold figure of the crucified Christ shone among countless precious stones, and the wounds on the body were made with rubies. A high, square pillar made a pedestal for the cross, decorated on its four sides with enamels, each of which depicted a mystery from the life of our Lord, paralleled by one from the old testament. The original foreshadowing of the cross was to be seen in the brazen serpent of Moses, and the sign of Tau written on the foreheads of the elect. Abel appeared with his lamb, Abraham with his ram, and Melchisedech with bread and wine. The sermon on the mount was juxtaposed with the giving of the law on Sinai, and the tongues of Pentecost with the tower of Babel. Other important symbols were the widow of Sarepta with her cross of firewood, the bunch of grapes from the promised land, Jonah and the whale, Samson carrying off the gates of Gaza, the Jesse tree and the mystic mill, with St Paul grinding the corn of the old testament for the new believers.' One can still get quite a good idea of Suger's designs from the ambulatory windows, where these same types appear in compositions of a clarity and harmony that

speaking volumes for the lucid and convinced mind that conceived them.

Now the purpose which Suger claims for every part of the *opus nobile* is offered, from the start, in the couplet on the bronze doors. *Mens hebes ad vera per materialia surgit*. The mind, being of itself a poor, limited thing, must be carried up to the true by means of these material images. The soul is, on account of the fall, abject and downcast, and it must be uplifted by the sight of the divine light. The mind must of necessity be led to pure truth by means of symbols. Between the human spirit and the pure idea, Suger sees always the need for an intermediary something, and in this case that something is art. In every page of his *Administration* and *Consecration* we can perceive his love of beauty, and his faith in the power of art.

Suger needed to explain what he had done, as we have already noted, because the work was new and unfamiliar. But there was a second motive, no less important. He had his critics to contend with, and their strictures were based, not on a lack of familiarity with his artistic purpose, so much as a disapproval of any sort of decoration in church, whether significant or irrelevant, and a horror of anything over and above the basic and essential, even in the building of the church itself. The purists were saying that there was no longer any need for types and figures, since these belonged to the old testament. Now that we have the dispensation of the new law, they would claim, we have in effect the reality which these prefigured, therefore they are useless. 'How is it', asks St Aelred, for instance, 'that we still have music on pipes and the clash of cymbals in our churches, now that the types and figures have passed away, and the Church is fulfilled in her stature amongst us?' This was the sort of thesis that St Bernard imposed on the general Chapter at Cîteaux, where no doubt he caused quite a flurry among those of his fellow abbots who were fond of the type of gay manuscript illumination which St Stephen Harding, their founder, had favoured. To serve God with a pure heart and a contrite spirit was the one thing necessary for the purists, as they eschewed external beauty and with it, one fears, much of the significance of worship.

Suger, of course, concurred with the critics on the primacy of pure heart and contrite spirit, but these in themselves were simply not enough, he argued. 'Let every man think what he



will', he wrote. 'My belief is this—that whatever is most precious and most sought after belongs by right, first and foremost, to the administration of the most holy eucharist. If God, in the old testament, commanded that the blood of goats and heifers should be dispensed from golden vessels, how much more are golden vessels, and precious stones, and all rich and rare things, required for the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing that any of us can offer is worthy of that sacrifice. Even if we were all turned into angels, we should still be unworthy to serve at the offering of that ineffable victim, so infinitely great is the propitiation that we have for our sins.

'I agree that a holy soul, a pure mind, and a faithful intention are the main and essential things to offer, but it is still necessary to offer external things, vessels and ornaments. We must serve with purity in the inward part, and nobility in everything external. In every way we must serve our Lord with what is becoming, since he in his goodness has denied us absolutely nothing. He has joined his nature to ours, to make in himself one wonderful individual, and he has placed us at his right hand, and promised us his kingdom.'

Having thus stated his mind, Suger lost no opportunity for acquiring the best of everything. 'You would have seen kings and princes', he tells us, 'and many other great men doing as we ourselves did, taking off all their rings, their gold, jewels and pearls, to be put in the golden shrine of the relics of our patron St Denis.' For the patronal altar alone he gives a catalogue that intentionally recalls the heavenly Jerusalem, with sardius and opaz, jasper and chrysolite, onyx and beryl, sapphire, emerald and carbuncle. And as if all this were still not enough, his whim on major feast days was to have the altar further embellished with the fabulous cross of St Eloy, and the *escrin de Charlemagne*, of which the votive crowns of Cluny with their hanging crystal drops give us, perhaps, a slight idea.

If we find the picture dazzling in conjecture, we can imagine how St Bernard must have felt on that day in June 1144, when the stone was still white, and the gold had only recently left the goldsmiths' hands. Fortunately there must have been many others to praise and admire, and to feel as Suger felt. When he saw all this display of splendour and beauty at the service of the saints, he confides, his meditation became a kind of ecstasy. He seemed to

be transported somewhere . . . *sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga*, a place remote from this base world, even if it were not quite in heaven. He felt lifted up, *anagogico more*, he says . . . *Deo donante*. It was a gift of God, this contemplation, and it was an anagoge, a 'moral' meaning in a breathtaking collection of jewellery, another instance of the inadequate human spirit being lifted up to the true by means of material images.

Suger's justification for treating a hierarchy of symbols as objects of contemplation, like his defence of 'external nobility' and his conscious re-introduction of typology to art, are all explained by his conviction: *Mens hebes ad vera per materialia surgit*. And as Panofsky was the first to observe, these words are a faithful echo of a passage from the pseudo-Denys to the effect that 'it is impossible for our minds to rise up to the imitation and contemplation of the heavenly hierarchy, without being taken thither by the material things that are commensurate with our nature'. It was Suger's great good fortune that the author of those words, a fifth-century Syrian, should have been popularly identified with the patron saint of Paris, thanks to his assuming the name of Areopagite. This composite saint, so much more than a box of relics for Suger, was an authoritative theologian, a brain, a living voice. Suger had absorbed the doctrine of the pseudo-Denys completely, and when the time came to put it into action, what could be more fitting than to do so in the service of St Denis's own shrine?

As Panofsky says, Suger found in the very words of his patron a Christian philosophy that permitted him to greet material beauty as a vehicle for spiritual beatitude, instead of forcing him to flee from it as from a temptation. He incarnated the very thesis that was most opposed to St Bernard, who condemned art, not because he did not feel its charms, but because he felt them too keenly not to consider them dangerous. St Bernard, like Plato, banished art because it belonged to the wrong side of a world that was seen as an unending revolt of the temporal against the eternal, of human reason against faith, of the senses against the spirit. But Suger, thanks to 'saint Denis', could reinstate art in the harmony of Christian tradition, and make it lead the minds of men to God. The explanatory verses which he wrote, his Dionysian commentary on the new French style, reveal him at the stage of gratification when all the incidental pride in him, of organizer

theologian and artist, has deflated to the point where there is left only a humble and wondering gratitude . . . *Magne Dionysi, portas aperi Paradisi.*

---

## REVIEWS

INFANT BAPTISM IN THE FIRST FOUR CENTURIES. By Joachim Jeremias. Translated by David Cairns. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

Infant baptism became once more the object of vigorous debate among protestants with the publication in 1943 of Karl Barth's book firmly rejecting it. The present book by the eminent scholar, Professor Jeremias, will be regarded by many—and rightly so—as a decisive contribution to the controversy. Not that it is a polemical work; in fact, it is simply an exhaustive, dispassionately scientific examination of the relevant data available from the first four centuries. But the conclusion emerges clearly: from the beginning the Church baptized infants.

The new testament does not expressly mention infant baptism, nor do the first Christian writers before Tertullian, although Irenaeus's remark about the rebirth of infants is a direct enough reference to their baptism. There are, however, converging indications. Professor Jeremias gives no impression of forcing the evidence, but, with great scholarship, he draws on every source that illustrates the bearing of the various indirect references, so that his penetrating commentary leaves the reader with the conviction that the probative value of these is greater than is often supposed. This is so with the *oikos* (household) formula of Acts and Paul, the analogy with proselyte baptism and circumcision, and the baptismal significance given by the early Church



to Christ's blessing of the children (Mark 10, 13-16), which are the main items from the first period. It needs no great effort to show the outstanding importance of the later, explicit statements of Origen and Hippolytus, who stand witness for so great part of the Church, but even here the author's commentary casts fresh light on their value. For example, his remark that, since Eusebius tells us that the family of Origen had been Christian for several generations, the latter's assertion that infant baptism was of apostolic tradition could not have been made unless his father, and probably also his grandfather, had been baptized in infancy—which takes us back to the middle of the second century and probably even to the first half of that century. Lesser testimonies are made to add their weight, and a valuable feature of the book is the account of the evidence from inscriptions, which confirms the picture given by the literary sources. The last chapter deals with the crisis of the fourth century, when the custom spread of postponing baptism until the storms and stresses of youth were over. The author assesses the gravity and extent of the crisis and shows that, despite it, the practice of infant baptism went on continuously.

On one point the author changes the view he adopted in the German edition. It concerns the interpretation of I Cor. 7, 14—the difficult passage about the holiness of children born of a marriage between a Christian and a pagan. In the German edition, the author had argued that the implication of the text that children were holy merely by birth from a Christian showed that the children of Christians were not baptized. Now, he rightly doubts the validity of this reasoning. The analogy with circumcision and the fact that the similar 'sanctification' attributed to the pagan partner on account of the marriage did not obviate the necessity for his baptism on conversion means that the remark of Paul—explicable by a use of Jewish ritual terminology—in no way precludes the baptism of the children. The text, therefore, has no reference to baptism and is irrelevant to the question of infant baptism.

A theologian will want to pursue the subject of infant baptism further than this book does; for part of his task is to draw out the reasons which explain the possibility and necessity of baptizing those as yet incapable of a personal decision. Nevertheless, the starting-point must always remain the practice of the Church. Although a Catholic rests secure in the present teaching of a living tradition, a function of theology is to observe the origin and development of that tradition. Hence the theologian will find this book invaluable. And it can be recommended to all who find themselves for any reason obliged to discuss or answer questions on this matter.

CHARLES DAVIS

THE BREAD WHICH WE BREAK. By G. D. Yarnold. (O.U.P.; 10s. 6d.)  
 THE BREAKING OF BREAD. By John Coventry, S.J. (Harvill Press; 15s.)

Such similar titles advertise very different books on the Christian eucharist. Dr Yarnold is an Anglican and his approach is through biblical theology; Fr Coventry, the English Jesuit provincial, gives the history and meaning of the prayers which form the Roman rite mass. They are both intended for a wide public.

Most of Dr Yarnold's book is very winning indeed. Rather than starting off with the accounts of institution and Johannine teaching, he leads into them by seeking to understand the hieratic language of the epistle to the Hebrews; this order is excellent, and he goes on to conclude the first part of the book with a piecing together of how the eucharist was celebrated in the first few centuries. He places the eucharist in its period of saving history: it 'looks back to the saving act of God in Christ, which culminated in the Passion-Resurrection-Ascension event . . . looks forward to the *parousia*, when the Lord will return in judgment and healing, and will make all things new' (page 77). As in much modern writing on this subject the author is concerned to give the resurrection and ascension their proper value in our Lord's redemptive life, making good a deficiency of much traditional theology; this leads him into his one real error in this part of the book, that of seeing our Lord's sacrifice more in his presentation glorified before his Father's throne than in his death on the cross. It is not unfair to say the author is excellent as far as he goes: his defects are those of omission: the Catholic wants further to know how the immolated and glorious Christ is made present at mass; in a quotation from the same page as before it remains incomplete to say the eucharistic worship of the Church 'draws its meaning here and now from the perfect sacrifice offered eternally by Christ in the heavenly places'. Dr Yarnold doubtless intends an answer to be sought in the sections on real presence and sacrifice towards the end of the book; but there the direction of his interest has changed, and he has inevitably become partisan in discussing the disagreements in the practice of this, the sacrament of unity. His eirenic intentions to seek as much common ground as possible will not satisfy a Catholic, who will not share his appreciation of the unity in diversity of the Church of England, nor his apprehensions about dogmatic definition. Thus there are opinions expressed that would mislead or upset less instructed Catholics, for whom this book cannot be recommended, but others would profit from the author's many perceptive insights. They could not but be moved by his longing for Christian unity. He does not fall into the besetting temptation of ecumenism, that of preferring Christian

fellowship to Christian doctrine (noble as the aim may sound, it prizes love of neighbour above love of God), and wants no doctrinal fences to be rushed. Charity and realism mark his concluding pages. He is prepared for Christian unity to come about in a way he cannot even envisage: at this deepest level men of good will are at one.

Fr Coventry has considerably revised the first edition of his book on the mass which appeared ten years ago. Events outrun their chroniclers, and here the celebrant still gives an absolution before communion and frequently concludes with *Benedicamus Domino*. This is a work of popularization: to quote the author's own words, 'this book unashamedly pilfers the achievements of these scholars (i.e., liturgical scholars) in order to lay the gist of their discoveries, in as simple a form as possible, before the general public'. Such a book was needed, and here it is supplied, practically indispensable for an informed appreciation of the missal.

Three short chapters sketch the outline of low mass, and then the bulk of the book consists of a more detailed commentary. The arrangement could hardly be otherwise, but contrary to the author's misgivings more rather than less reiteration is needed: information on the *Kyrie eleison*, for instance, might be supposed confined to that given in the appropriate place in the commentary, but the realization that nothing is said there about its being in Greek leads one to look for the explanation given earlier on. The neat and orderly account of the *Kyrie* given here is something many scholars still hope to write: this exemplifies how the author's overriding concern for the clearest possible picture prevents readers from suspecting how provisional many of the conclusions are, given our present defective knowledge. The liturgical nymph is notoriously inconstant, and there will be a pressing demand from Fr Coventry's admirers for another edition in a further ten years: how will he then explain why he has so modified a story to tell? Fr Gillick supplies sixty-three photographs in illustration. Technically they are only moderately good; and what they portray is far from ideal, in that the altar, vestments and chalice reflect the inexpressive taste of thirty years back: the scene has much in common with the unfortunate newspaper advertisement that the Catholic Enquiry Centre uses. But worst of all, where is the congregation? Should mass be depicted as a dialogue between celebrant and server?

The introduction on the theory of the mass is more Fr Coventry speaking with his own voice. The reviewer cannot approve the distinction drawn between *real* sacrifice ('the effective submission of a man's heart and mind and will to God') and *ritual* sacrifice: any outward manifestation of submission to God is termed ritual sacrifice, even Christ's death on Calvary. But ritual is surely stereotyped action that



can be indefinitely repeated: Christ's physical death was initiative, the culminating point, the decisive moment of his life of sacrifice, the unique event which assures the inner efficacy of the mass, saving it from being magic or mere wish. The action of the sacrifice of the mass can properly be termed ritual: it is the sacramental sign of Christ's physical sacrifice, imaging it so fully that it is literally re-presented; which men will put into play till the Lord returns with power and glory and fulfils all signs. Fr Coventry goes on to distinguish sacrifice from sacrament in the mass; this is an unhappy disjunction: if the mass is a sacrifice it can only be so sacramentally. One further point: in the course of the commentary Fr Coventry follows his guides in finding considerable fault with some features of the mass, and yet in his introduction he states, 'no great changes are to be expected, nor are they desirable'. Given the torpor of English Catholics would not plain speaking have been better, to prepare them for the considerable revisions that may well lie ahead?

THEODORE TAYLOR, O.P.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS. By J. H. Ropes. (O.U.P.; 7s. 6d.)

ETHICS AND THE GOSPEL. By T.W. Manson. (S.C.M. Press; 12s. 6d.)

THE FOUR GOSPELS. By Lucien Cerfaux. (Darton, Longman and Todd; The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland; 9s. 6d.)

Here are three slender books from the pens of distinguished scholars, only one of whom is alive today. Mgr Cerfaux stands for what is scholarly and good in the Louvain tradition; J. H. Ropes brilliantly represented the Harvard of twenty-six years ago; and Professor T. W. Manson, in his lifetime, embodied much of what was best in the new testament work done in England.

Let us hope that it is not a barrenness or a vacuum in new testament writing which brought about the reprinting of a work which first appeared in 1934. Admittedly it deserved to be better known, and if some of Professor Ropes' suggestions had been followed up, some of our contemporaries would be less heavily entrenched in the positions which they occupy. It is indeed a pleasure to read these admirable and clear chapters, so full of a certain freshness of manner in looking at our age-old gospels. Professor Ropes wins our sympathy at the outset by stating, 'I shall rather look at each Gospel for itself, as an individual book, the work, not merely of a compiler but of an author in the proper sense who tried to serve his generation with some kind of literary aim' (p. 3). At least we are fully in agreement with this, even if we do not accept all his findings or his way of looking at gospel origins. Yet his foresight and acumen showed him that source criticism was not enough; that possibly Q could be dispensed with, and that

certainly Q's existence is not so well established as many are taught to think (p. 37). All this was to the good—thirty years ago. But should we now look back and not rather look ahead to newer problems and attitudes? Surely what needs to be written, and taught, is the reading of the gospels in the light of newer findings. Progressive new testament work today is post-Bultmanian, preoccupied with the *apport* of Qumrân and Nag Hamadi, with the true assessment of gnostic thought and pre-gnostic ideas, with the specifically judaeo-christian theology and the like.

No one would deny that there is a shortage of books on 'the biblical basis of ethics', and this no doubt is the reason for publication of lectures only one of which was revised by Professor Manson. Though Ronald Preston, lecturer in Christian ethics at Manchester University, has written up and made the best of some lecture notes, and there is much to be learned from many good pages, particularly on the old testament background, and the ethical ideals of judaism and how our Lord most perfectly fulfilled and transcended those ideals; how the imitation of Christ is the royal road of a Christian's perfection; how too, as the Hebrew of old was a member of God's kingdom, and close-knit to his brother Hebrew, so too the Christian after him is one of a community (as we would say, one of the mystical body of Christ . . .) and 'the ethic we are dealing with is the ethic of a kingdom: the ethic of a society with a leader and a ruler . . . in the last resort Christian ethic inevitably comes back to Christ himself' (p. 102).

When we turn to Mgr Cerfaux's work, the first thing to strike us is that the English title is misleading. 'The Four Gospels' is not *La Voie vivante de l'Evangile au debut de l'Eglise* (correctly rendered in the German and Dutch translations). We can be misled about the nature of a book by the title of the book. In this case the true nature of the book is further shown in that it appears in a popular series *Bible et Vie Chrétienne* which is addressed to all, clergy and layfolk alike, who wish to deepen their faith, to fortify it with substantial spiritual nourishment. It is important to assess correctly the nature of a writing before us, whether we are to read or translate or review it.

Fortunately Mgr Cerfaux is a great scholar actively pursuing new testament research at Louvain, and this little work is the best kind of popular work because it is penned by such an authority who can write an up-to-date, convincing, and absorbing popular work. He starts with a study of the good news and apostolic tradition. Then come chapters on each gospel, with their individual characteristics and even why St Matthew comes first. A sixth chapter tells of the transition from oral tradition to written gospels, and of the four-fold gospel which obtained in the Church. 'On the fringes of the four

explains the relative value of apocryphal writings, and how they are indirect evidences and help us to prize our gospels even more. Finally comes 'Christian Life under the sign of the gospel', or how of all the gospels it could be said 'These things were written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (Jn 20, 31).

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

LES PAROLES D'ADIEUX DU SEIGNEUR. By G.-M. Behler, O.P. (Editions du Cerf; 12 NF.)

The study of themes running in and through the Old and New Testaments has been much favoured in recent years, and it is always profitable. Nothing however can replace a word-for-word contact with the texts themselves as they are in their contexts. And this is the relief of Fr Behler, a German Dominican who has written this commentary of a meditative type on five famous chapters (John 13-17) which have always been looked upon as a source book for the spiritual life. That he should write in French, and Frenchman-like cite Loisy, is intriguing. Fr F.-M. Braun, O.P., in the preface explains that our author has the gift of tongues and is moved by a truly Pentecostal fire. Be that as it may, the author tells us what he meant to do: 'these pages are specially intended for contemplative souls. Oft-repeated experience has convinced us that, for such souls, nothing is more nourishing than the Word of God explained by the self-same Word. The preacher who effaces himself, as it were hiding himself behind the divine word, leads others to prayer and furnishes them with truly spiritual nourishment.'

We can say that Fr Behler has succeeded in this intention. Sentence by sentence, he comments on the whole content of five chapters, pausing to introduce the sequence and quiet flow of ideas, and all the while bringing out the content of the text by frequent references to other passages of scripture, as also to some more helpful comments of Fathers and Doctors. And the writer effaces himself behind the divine word in that he makes little or no show of technicalities or erudite apparatus: yet we know, and sense, that he is a master of these, who simply wants us to hear the voice of St John and our Lord in the Gospel.

This is a book which will appeal to prayerful and contemplative folk, and is to be recommended as such.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.



SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE. By A. Penna. (St Paul Publications; 30s.)

MEDITATIONS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT—THE PSALMS. By Gaston Brillet, C. Or. (Desclée; \$3.50.)

An informed 'life' of the apostle to the gentiles, such as the first book attempts to give us, should afford many readers a clearer penetration of the text of his epistles. The original Italian version of this book, published in 1947, has now been translated in condensed form. The best feature, of the English condensation at least, is the treatment of the historical, geographical and cultural environment against which St Paul's life-story is presented to us. Clearly the author draws on a wide knowledge of the mythological and historical worlds of Greece and Rome; and he applies this knowledge effectively at each change of scene throughout the book. Moreover, he has used imagination intelligently to clothe many of the naked facts which are presented unadorned in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Much less happy is what the blurb calls the book's 'sensitive understanding of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual life and development of the great apostle'. The author appears to belong to the (surely dwindling) school who regard Paul's theological thought as having been fully developed from the moment of his conversion, or at any rate from the beginning of his ministry at Antioch. When, in each of his various epistles, Paul deals with the particular topics called for by the *ad hoc* situation, he does so, it seems, by drawing on his already complete understanding of the mysteries revealed to him by the risen Lord. There is no hint of progressive and continuous theological advance during his missionary life, no sign of the apostle's wrestling with problems leading to the evolution of new and yet profounder doctrine. And it is the same with Paul's struggles with himself, of which there is no mention here. There are just two brief references to his 'weaknesses, if they may be called such' (p. 233, cf. 125), at which we almost hear the author's embarrassed cough as he hastens on to explain how they really sprang from zeal for the gospel! Readers in search of up-to-the-minute scholarship should be warned that very few references are made to works later than 1930.

The book of short meditations offers us evocative texts from the psalms, redolent of the psalmists' rich experience of life in the presence of God. But how is this standard, inherent in the original text, to be sustained in a rationalized meditation? As is inevitable, P. Brillet conceptualizes some of the imagery of semitic religious poetry, with the result, *ipso facto*, that much of the impact of the pristine immediacy and colourful vigour of the psalms is drained away. Faced with this perennial difficulty of 'explaining' scripture in the ethos of western civilization, this book does creditably.

ROBERT SHARP, O.P.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. By Fr Sebastiano Pagano, O.M.I. (University Seminary, Ottawa, Canada; n.p.)

This is a most ingenious table, a lithographed typescript covering ten pages on a single folded sheet of stout paper, with a continuous date-line beginning in 1370 (Ugarit, etc.) and ending with the birth of Christ. The main periods and reigns are clearly marked at the top, and the various writings of the old testament are placed beneath, showing graphically their situation on the chronological background. Here are some examples of placings. The early epics belong to the fourteenth, thirteenth and twelfth centuries. J is placed in Solomon's time ('uses earlier oral and written traditions'), E in the eighth century and P in the exilic period. The first recension of Deuteronomy is placed with Hezekiah, and the Pentateuch is edited in the fifth century. Job is in the fifth century, as also Obadiah, and Joel is about 400. Zechariah 9-14 is placed in the fourth century, Daniel in the second and Wisdom about 50 B.C. While not everyone will agree with all these datings (for no such table could please everyone), the plan does represent fairly general opinion today (Catholic and non-Catholic alike) and provides a useful working hypothesis (with one's own reservations). Its clarity will make it a most useful instrument for any day-to-day teacher of Scripture.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

AN OUTLINE OF ANGLO-AMERICAN BIBLE HISTORY. By Edgar Newgass. (Batsford; 25s.)

A pleasantly produced but slight book (forty-eight pages of text, followed by seventeen plates of title-pages), purporting to tell as a simple story the growth of the protestant Bible in England and America. The story is told from Tyndale to King James, and then moves to America until the Revised version of 1881. A few modern versions are then mentioned, including Knox, and here a few lines are rather inaccurately given about Douay. There are a few samples of texts, old and new, and a sketched bibliography. The author says on page 37 that each translation has been 'a labour of love', and the same may certainly be said of his own book.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

ON THE ETERNAL IN MAN. By Max Scheler. (S.C.M. Press; 63s.)

This new addition to *The Library of Philosophy and Theology* more than justifies its considerable expense. It consists of five sections, of which the third is by far the longest and most important. The first



deals with the vital function of repentance in the metabolism of the human soul; a past action is never wholly irremediable, as it can only acquire final significance in the context of one's life as a whole. The second section, 'The Nature of Philosophy', is a sketch of the tasks of philosophy as envisaged by Husserl and his followers—to apprehend the essences of things without cultural or scientific preconceptions. 'Christian Love and the Twentieth Century', the fourth of the series relates the contemporary moral chaos to a *de facto* replacement of Christian belief by the values of capitalism or the unsatisfying worship of a 'homogenized world-purée' of mankind; to those who deny that there has been such a change, Scheler replies that it must be admitted either that Christianity has lost its former place as the dominating spiritual force of European culture, or that it is bankrupt—now that Europe is guilty of so many crimes, no third position is tenable. 'The Reconstruction of European Culture', which seems even more pertinent to the aftermath of the second world war than to its original context at the end of the first, insists that only by recognizing our collective guilt can we hope to rebuild our civilization.

The third section, 'Problems of Religion', is outstanding among modern writings on the philosophy of religion for clarity, erudition, and power of argument. Recent catastrophes have cleared men's eyes for God by removing both the pantheist shadow of him and the idol of humanity. Metaphysics may be a way to religion, but neither is a satisfactory substitute for the other, as metaphysics apprehends God primarily as *ens a se*, religion as *summum bonum*.

Two outlooks in particular are obstructive to religious knowledge: the Kantian, which conceives the mental habits of a particular epoch to be fundamental laws of human thought; and the positivist, which skims from our experience only those elements which relate to the control of our physical environment. Any epistemology which includes both 'an evolutionary theory and a sociology of mental structures' will show these defects quite clearly. Man has a natural experience of God, the psychological reduction of which is based merely on prejudice; special revelation, on the other hand, seems to depend rather on individual *homines religiosi*, who must be distinguished sharply from the genius or hero as well as from the apostle, saint or reformer within a religious tradition. Apart from such revelation, human knowledge of God is an essentially collective enterprise; will not be complete until every man from every civilization has made his own contribution. A heretic is one who does not realize that a private knowledge of God is impossible, since in principle this knowledge can be conserved and extended only on the basis of a tradition independent alike of individual caprice and cultural change. That he

who speaks might have kept silent is essential to personal communication; so the contingency of historical events is appropriate to the revelation of a personal God. Of all known historical persons, Jesus seems the most plausible manifestation of the divine, both in his acts and in the claims he made for himself.

Scheler's Achilles heel is his theory of the intuitive certainty of religious and moral knowledge, which is particularly vulnerable to neo-positivism with its canons of verification. But this facet of his thought can be modified without damage to his argument as a whole.

Bernard Noble's translation is clear and readable, and the frank confession where paraphrase has had to be resorted to, invites the reader's confidence as to its overall accuracy.

HUGO MEYNELL

THE FAMILY BOOK. By Rosemary Haughton. (Darton, Longman and Todd; 6s.)

OUR LORD'S LIFE. By Amelia Tondini Melgari. Translated by Joy Mary Merruzzi. (Oldbourne Press; 25s.)

BERNADETTE. By G. B. Stern. (Nelson; 12s. 6d.)

1. 'It is not your job to pick the fruit, it is your job to keep on planting the seed!' is the final piece of advice from this mother of six. Illustrated with her own pen-and-ink sketches, this excellent small book is packed with suggestions as to how Catholic parents can 'plant the seed' of the love of God in their children. A homely outline of all essential Christian doctrine, it is enlivened with many practical examples of how one Catholic family live out their faith. Particularly stimulating are their celebrations of the feasts and fasts of the liturgical year, and the ways in which they teach their children to grow from infancy in understanding of prayer, the sacraments, the mass—and sin. Though addressed throughout to parents, the extreme simplicity of language and illustration leads one to suppose that the older children are expected to read the book over their parents' shoulders.

2. The text of this life of Christ for children of any age is in the main very readable. The slightly stilted or jejune passages probably derive from the translation. It might have been more lively if at least all direct speech instead of being paraphrased had been rendered in a known English version. The illustrations dominate the narrative—there's a large one on every page. Some of these will hardly fail to please. They are extremely colourful, well drawn and dramatic. A few may be too frightening for younger readers. This is a finely produced book that practically all will appreciate once past the lurid dust-cover.



3. For children of about ten to fourteen years old this is an excellent introduction to the life of St Bernadette and an antidote to the more sentimental 'ballads' about Lourdes. As might be expected of such an author, it is a tale exceptionally well told—exciting, direct and comprehensive without being long. Some may not like the Turneresque illustrations, but do not be put off buying this for young friends and relations.

ANN HALES-TOOKE

## NOTICES

GRACE AND GLORY, by E. L. Mascall (with a foreword by the Archbishop of York; Faith Press; 5s.), is a meditative study of some aspects of the life of heaven, in terms of the Christian's experience of its beginning here on earth. It is an admirable example of how deeply theological ideas can be made comprehensible and relevant to lay people when they are already so to the theologian.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS, by Bertil Gartner (Collins 21s.), is a learned study of the text by the Assistant Professor in theology at Uppsala. The author develops an account of the theology implied in the gospel, and relates it to gnostic thought.

LA VIE ET LA DOCTRINE SPIRITUELLE DU PÈRE LALLEMENT is the first of a new collection (entitled *Christus*) published by Desclée de Brouwer (120 FB). It is finely edited, with helpful yet unobtrusive notes and a forty-page introduction, by François Courel, S.J.

PROGRESS THROUGH MENTAL PRAYER, by Edward Leen, C.S.SP. (18s.) and TWO HUNDRED EVENING SERMON NOTES (27s. 6d.) by Canon Drinkwater are reprints by Thomas More Books of works that originally appeared in 1935 and 1928 respectively. It is no fault of the author that the outlook of this time now seems 'dated'; it is a measure of the great resurgence of doctrinal and scriptural understanding since that time. The preacher in particular must ask himself if he *ought* to be saying just what he did thirty years ago. In view of this the price of the second book in particular (260 pp. long) seems astonishingly high.

THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE, by the Abbot of Downside, reviewed on page 330 of the January issue, was incorrectly stated to have been published by the Helicon Press. They are in fact the American publishers; in this country it is put out by Darton, Longman and Todd.

L.B.